

TRENDS

TO KNOW

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DATASSENTIAL

THE TREND

A variety of operators are offering sides that capitalize on the larger newstalgia trend. Pictured here, for instance, are mac & cheese bites, which are up 49% on side dish menus over the past 4 years (Datassential Menu Trends). Loaded tots, which also tie into the newstalgia trend, can be a vehicle for a variety of toppings, including cheeses like beer cheese or cheese sauce, and are up 24% on side dish menus over the past 4 years. Globally-inspired sides like elote (Mexican street corn that often features cotija) are appearing more on side dish menus too. Sides are also taking inspiration from mains and may be just a smaller portion of a main dish (which could ease up on labor) – think a Caesar salad, which could be offered as both a side and a main. Next-gen Caesar salads are a 2024 trend Datassential highlighted.



SIZING UP
STANDOUT SIDES

DAIRY REPORT

Sides present all sorts of opportunities to showcase dairy, especially cheese. Sprinkle cheeses onto side salads featuring trend-forward ingredients like heirloom veggies, drizzle cheese sauce onto loaded tots, or tap into newstalgia and showcase mac & cheese bites as a side. Also consider how different side dishes index higher in certain regions of the U.S. Cheese grits, for instance, index higher in the South, while scalloped potatoes (which typically are topped with a creamy cheddar cheese-based sauce) index higher in the Midwest. Yogurt also can be a health-driven side on breakfast menus or star in dressings or savory sauces drizzled on side salads.

MENU INSPIRATION

MAC 'N CHEESE BITES

TGI Fridays | Dallas, TX (HQ)
Deep-fried mac 'n cheese served with spicy queso and marinara sauce.

LOADED TOTS

Midtown Eats | Newport News, VA
Tater tots smothered in cheddar Jack, creamy cheddar, or queso and topped with bacon, onions, and jalapenos.

CITY GRITS

Another Broken Egg Cafe
| Orlando, FL (HQ)
Grits with cheese topped with baked bacon, green onions, and tomatoes.

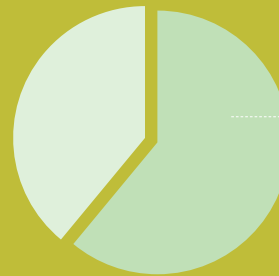
POTATO SIDE KICK

Zookz Sandwiches | Phoenix, AZ (HQ)
Scalloped potatoes with cheddar and mozzarella cheeses and green onions.

LOBSTER CORN ELOTE

Dakota's Steakhouse | Dallas, TX
Traditional corn elote with peppers, queso fresco, lime, and cilantro tossed with lobster.

DATA FILE



61%

OF CONSUMERS
LOVE/LIKE
LOADED TOTS

Datassential Consumer Preferences Platform

TREND STAGE

UBIQUITY



Most restaurants serve sides, making the overall concept of side dishes Ubiquitous, but specific sides can fall anywhere on the MAC. Mac & cheese bites and loaded tots (which can be a vehicle for a wide range of cheeses and cheese sauces) are some of the fastest-growing sides currently and in Adoption and Proliferation on the MAC, respectively. Elote is also in Proliferation on the side dish MAC, but with how much growth it's seeing, it could be on the verge of moving into Ubiquity.

Consider leveraging sides that tie into various U.S. regions – for instance, cheese grits in the South, or scalloped potatoes in the Midwest. Also tap into the larger newstalgia trend by capitalizing on sides like mac & cheese bites and/or loaded tots, both which can serve as vehicles for any number of cheeses and cheese sauces. On breakfast menus, consider adding yogurt as a health-forward side option, too.

KEY
TAKEAWAY